DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 494 PS 020 287

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TITLE Parental Influences on Ethnic Identity Formation in Adolescents.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Seattle, WA, April 18-20, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Asian Americans; Blacks; Comparative Analysis; *Cultural Awareness; Ethnic Groups; *Ethnicity; High Schools; High School Students; Hispanic Americans; Minority Groups; *Parent Influence; *Self Concept; *Socialization

ABSTRACT

In a study of the relationship between parents' ethnic attitudes and socialization practices and the ethnic identity of their American-born children, 60 adolescents, aged 16 to 18 years, from 1 of 3 ethnic groups (Asian American, Black, and Hispanic) and one parent for each adolescent, were surveyed. The research was conducted to provide information on ethnic identity and self-esteem. The adolescents, who attended an ethnically diverse urban high school, were selected as scoring either high or low on ethnic identity. Parents of adolescents high in ethnic identity differed significantly from those with low ethnic identity in two ways: (1) the importance they attached to maintaining their cultural heritage; and (2) the extent to which they tried to teach their children ways of dealing with such problems as prejudice and discrimination. There were significant ethnic group differences in the socialization practices of parents; for example, Asian parents were most likely to talk to their child about the culture, and Hispanic parents were most likely to practice traditions in the home. All parents cited education as necessary, but Black parents stressed hard work and Asian and Hispanic parents emphasized fitting in and getting along with others. The parents of high-scoring teens provided more information to their children on all aspects of socialization that concerned ethnicity. Contains four references. (Author/LB)

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Paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development, April, 1991, Seattle, WA.

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PARENTAL INFLUENCES ON ETHNIC IDENTITY FORMATION IN ADOLESCENTS

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ED341494

Abstract

Sixty American-born adolescents, aged 16 to 18 years, from one of three ethnic groups (Asian American, Black, and Hispanic) were selected as scoring either high or low on ethnic identity. Their parents were interviewed. Parents of adolescents high in ethnic identity differed significantly from those low in ethnic identity in both the importance they attached to maintaining their cultural heritage and in the extent to which they tried to teach their son or daughter ways of dealing with problems such as prejudice and discrimination.

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Ethnic identity can be defined as one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group, together with the feelings, attitudes, and behaviors associated with that membership. It is a salient aspect of identity for members of ethnic minority groups, and has been shown to be related to self-esteem (see Phinney, 1990, for a recent review). A major influence on the development of ethnic identity in children and adolescence is likely to be the family. Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, and Allen (1990) have described socialization practices of Black parents, and Branche and Newcombe (1986) have shown that parental attitudes are related to the racial attitudes of young Black children. However, there is no research linking ethnic attitudes and practices to ethnic identity outcomes for adolescents. Furthermore, there has been little or no research on these issues in other American ethnic minority families.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parents' ethnic attitudes and socialization practices and the ethnic identity of their American-born adolescent son or daughter, in families from three ethnic groups: Asian American, Black, and Hispanic.

METHOD

Participants

The participatns were 60 American-born adolescents, aged 16 to 18 years (mean: 16.7 years), and either their mother or father. The adolescents attended an ethnically diverse urban high school and were members of one of three ethnic groups: Asian

American (9 males, 9 females), Black (9 males, 7 females) and Hispanic, primarily Mexican American (16 males, 10 females). The parents included 52 mothers and 8 fathers.

Socio-economic status (SES) was determined by the parents' report of occupation: (1) professional or managerial (6.7%); white collar or skilled labor (70%); and unskilled labor (23.3%). Chi-square analysis revealed a significant difference in SES among the three ethnic groups, χ^2 (df = 4) = 23.8, p. < .001. Among the Hispanics, 46.2% were unskilled workers, but only 5.6% of Asians and 6.3% of Blacks were in this category. All parents in the professional/managerial category were Black.

Parents' place of birth differed significantly among the three groups (χ^2 = 51.4, p < .001. For 24 of the adolescents (all the Black adolescents, one Hispanic, and 7 Asians), both parents were American-born. For 24 of the adolescents (21 Hispanics and 3 Asians), both parents were foreign born. For 12 (8 Asians and 4 Hispanics), one parent was American-born and one, foreign born. 1 In summary, for all of the Black adolescents, both parents were American born; for 96% of the Hispanic adolescents and 61% of the Asians, one or both parents were foreign born. Marital status of the parents, determined by parental self-report, showed a significant difference among ethnic groups, χ^2 (df = 2) = 12.1 p < .01. Among the Black parents, 43.8% were married, as compared to 94.4% of the Asians and 80% of the Hispanics.

Procedures

An initial questionnaire was given to a sample of 417 high school students. From these, 78 adolescents were selected, on the basis of being American born, identifying self as being

either Asian American, Black, or Hispanic and having both parents from the same ethnic group, and having scored either high (mean = 3.5) or low (mean = 2.4) on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). Sixty of these subjects agreed to take part in the present interview study.

One parent of each adolescent was individually interviewed by an interviewer of the same ethnic background as the subject. Interviews were carried out in the adolescent's home, at a time convenient to the adolescent and the parent. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and coded. Codes were developed by a team of research assistants representing the same ethnic groups as the subjects. Each interview was coded by two coders; agreement between coders was above 80%.

RESULTS

1. Parents of high ethnic identity adolescents were significantly more likely to state that they tried to prepare their teen for living in a diverse society. There was a trend for these parents to see their culture as distinct and to feel it was important to maintain cultural traditions (see Figure 1 and Table 1).
2. Parents of high ethnic identity adolescents provided significantly more information, in the interview, about the characteristics of their own culture. They also provided more responses regarding the expected effects of ethnicity on the child, the ways in which the child learns about his or her own culture, and the ways in which the family transmits the culture, although these differences did not

attain significance.

3. <u>There were significant ethnic group differences in the socialization practices of parents.</u>

   Asian parents were most likely to talk to their child about the culture; Hispanic parents were most likely to practice traditions in the home.

   Black parents were most likely to mention discrimination as a problem and least likely to tell children to ignore discrimination.

   When questioned about the qualities needed for success, all parents mentioned education as necessary; in addition, Black parents stressed hard work, while Hispanic and Asian parents emphasized fitting in and getting along with others (see Table 2).

DISCUSSION

Adolescents who score high on a measure of ethnic identity, that is, who have thought about their ethnicity and have clear, positive attitudes toward themselves as ethnic group members, have parents who report trying to prepare their son or daughter for living in a diverse society. There were few differences in the specific <u>types</u> of attitudes and experiences mentioned between parents of high and low ethnic identity teens. However, the parents of high scoring teens provided <u>more</u> information, in the interviews, on all aspects of socialization regarding ethnicity. These parents appear to be more aware of their own culture and its implications in their lives, and to put more effort into helping the child to understand it. These results with

adolescents extend the findings of Branche and Newcombe (1986) that young children with high ethnic awareness have parents who teach their children about race.

There were large differences among ethnic groups in these socialization practices, with Hispanic parents describing more cultural traditions practiced in the home, while Asian parents were more likely to talk about the culture with their teens. Negative discrimination was seen as more of a problem by Black and Hispanic parents than by Asian parents.

This study involved only a small sample of parents. The role of parents in preparing their children for living in a culturally diverse society needs additional study, using larger samples, and involving other groups, including White adolescents.

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Table 1
RESPONSES OF PARENTS OF HIGH AND LOW ETHNIC IDENTITY ADOLESCENTS

1. Have you personally tried to prepare your son (or daughter) for living in a culturally diverse society?

Parents of high ethnic identity youth:

"I can remember some of Manzanar, and I can pass it on to him, what it was like and what he is going to have to go through in life."

"Yes, basically it is home training, understanding who she is, being proud of that, and knowing the accomplishments we as Black people have made."

"Yes. I have told her that when she goes out in the world,...she is going to run into a lot of these things, and she is going to have to learn how to cope with it and not let anyone put her down; put herself up on top; not let anyone put her down just because she is a Latin."

Parents of low ethnic identity youth:

"No, because I don't go into the old tradition of being Japanese. Because I was born here, I don't know, I mean in Japan their culture is a lot different."

"No, I don't know how to answer that question."

2. Do you think it is important to maintain and preserve the cultural practices of your ethnic group?

Parents of high ethnic identity youth:

"Yes, it is very important; otherwise, we lose our identity."

"It is beautiful to remember everything from our past; but at the same time we need to live in the present, keeping in mind that there were good times and memories from the past. And perhaps from these memories we may gain something to live in present times."

"Yes, but you have to work for that, to be proud of what you are, not to be ashamed of it, to keep the culture of your ethnic origins. It's kind of sad for people who don't have that."

Parents of low ethnic identity youth:

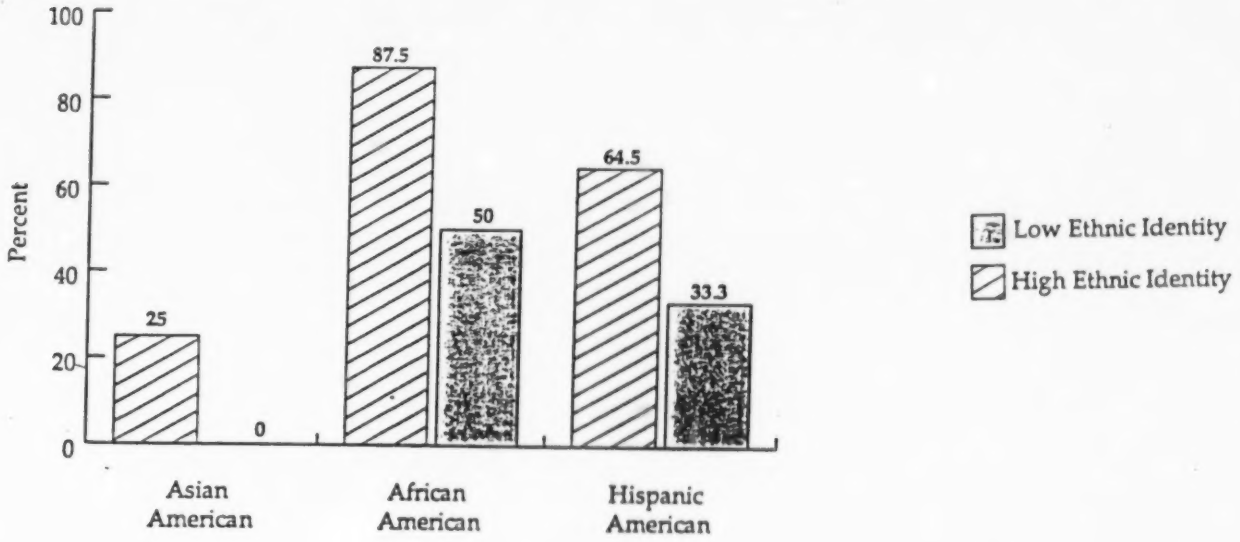
"I make the food, but the rest I do not think it is that important to preserve."

"Some of it, yes. Most of it gets lost someplace as the older generation passes on... I think eventually it will all fade away... I don't think culture is very important to the kids."

Table 2
ETHNIC GROUP DIFFERENCES IN PARENTAL ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCE

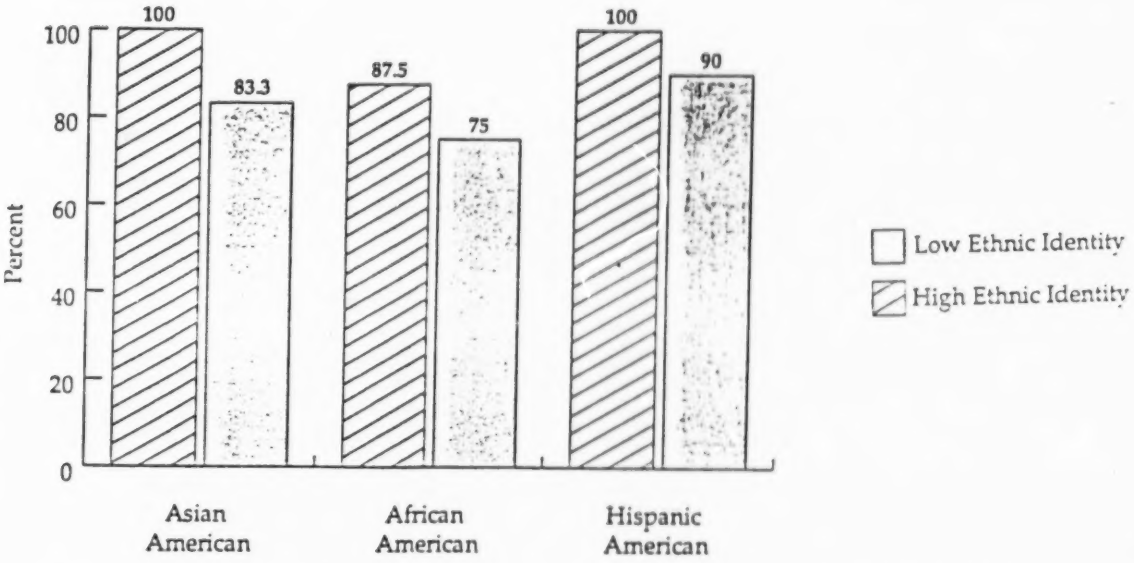
Experiences and attitudes mentioned in open-ended questions	Percentage reporting			
	Asians	Blacks	Hispanics	p
Parents talk to child about own culture	50.0%	12.5%	11.5%	<.01
Cultural traditions practiced in home	27.8	43.8	69.2	<.05
Negative discrimination as problem to be faced	16.7%	68.8%	42.3%	<.01
Child told to ignore discrimination	83.3	37.5	76.9	<.01
Education mentioned as needed for success	83.3	56.3	84.6	ns
Hard work mentioned as needed for success	27.8	56.3	15.4	<.05
Fitting in mentioned as needed for success	72.2	50.0	88.5	<.05

FIGURE 1. PERCENTAGES OF PARENTS RESPONDING YES, AS A FUNCTION OF THEIR ADOLESCENT'S HIGH OR LOW ETHNIC IDENTITY



"Have you personally tried to prepare your son or daughter for living in a culturally diverse society?"

High versus low ethnic identity: $\chi^2 = 4.5$, $P < .05$
Ethnic group differences: $\chi^2 = 13.1$, $p < .001$



"Do you think it is important to maintain and preserve the cultural practices of your ethnic group?"

High versus low ethnic identity: $\chi^2 = 2.6$, $p = .107$